Protection of Taj Mahal and Agra Fort against pollution

5443. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that contaminations of the environment and the high noise level are threatening the existence of the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the Supreme Court has issued notices to the Central Government, Uttar Pradesh Government and other concerned authorities and has warned that it would not hesitate to order closure of 5000 crore Mathura Refinery, if it continues to emit toxic smoke; and

(c) what measures Government have taken to save the World famous beautiful monuments from pollution, which threatens their existence?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) Environmental pollution has adverse effects on monuments, however, it has not been conclusively proved so far that contamination of environment and the hihg noise level are threatening the existence of thhe Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort.

(b) No notice of the Hon'ble Supreme Court regarding closure of the Mathura Refinery has been received.

(c) Government have taken the following steps to save Taj Mahal from pollution:

(i) A trapezium surrounding the Taj Mahal has been demarcated. No new polluting industry is allowed to be set up in this area.

(ii) There is a ban on the use of furnace oil and diesel generations by the industries in Agra. The foundries are not permitted to operate during winter nights.

(iii) A continuous sulpur dioxide monitoring station has been maintained at the Taj Mahal from January, 1991 to monitor the levels of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen in the ambient air.

(iv) The Mathura Refinery authorities are continuously monitoring the ambient air quality at Mathura and adjacent areas since the inception of the refinery.

(v) A network of ambient air quality monitoring stations has been set up and operated in Agra by the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board.

(vi) The Forest Department of Government of Uttar pradesh has created a green belt around the Taj Mahal by planting trees on available government land. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has also initiated a green belt development plan in Agra with the help of the Uttar Pradesh Government. It has been reported that 150000 saplings were planted in 1994 in fallow lands available in the vicinity of Taj Mahal.

(vii) The Archaeological Survey of India is constantly monitoring the ambient air quality including sulphur dioxide, suspended particulate matter and other pollutants as well as meterological data around Taj Mahal. Besides s this maintenance work of Taj Mahal is carried out regularly.

(viii) The Government of India has initiated a ten point package programme in the Agra Mathura Trapeziumto have Taj Mahal from the effects of air pollution. The components of the package programme include the following:

—LPG to be made available for all households.

—Unleaded/low lead petrol to be made available in the Trapezium.

—Preferential allocation of LPG to be made for industries.

—Low sulphur diesel for transport to be made available.

—Intensification of environment management to be made by the Mathura Refinery.

—Natural gas to be made available for industries.

—Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) to be made available for vehicles.

—Clean fuel to be arranged for Mathura Refinery.

—Hydrocracking technology to be set up for the Mathura Refinery.

—Identification of alternative strategies for environmental management in consultation with Asian Development Bank.

Shifting of Taj Mahal

5444. SYED SIBTEY RAZI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to certain reports proposing shifting of the Taj from Agra to a safer site;

(b) whether such a move has been suggested by the experts of the Ministry to save the Taj from environmental pollution;

(c) whether Government have taken any decision on these suggestions;

(d) if so, the details thereof, with estimated expenditure involved in it; and

(e) if not, the action proposed to be taken against those responsible for publication of such reports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) Yes, Sir, next item. "Taj to be shifted" was published on 1st April, 1995 in the Hindustan Times.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.

(e) This matter has been brought to the attention of the concerned authorities for appropriate action.

Extinction of rhinoceros

5445. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there are lets than 2,000 onehonned rhinoceroses left in India at present and their number is dwindling rapidly;

(b) whether the threat of extrinction of rhinoceroses is due to increased poaching, combined with habital destruction:

(c) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(d) what steps, if any have been taken by Government to curb this twin menace to the rhinoceros and other endangered species?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) The population of rhinoceros in the country is estimated at 1495. It is not true that their number is dwindling repidly.

(b) Although the rhinoceros is an endangered species it is not threatened with extinction as there are several populations distributed in 3 States and there has been significant decline in poaching cases in recent years. There are also no reports of habitat destruction as the rhino habitat is protected in the form of national parks and sanctuaries.

(d) The steps taken by the Government for protecting Rhinoceros and other endangered species are given below:

(i) A network of 6 wildlife sanctuaries and 3 national parks has been set up for conservation of the species and its habitat. Financial assistance is provided by the Central Government for development of national parks and sanctuaries, on request from the State Governments. A special scheme of Conservation of Rhinos in Assam has now been transferred to the State Go-